Contra Costa County Historical Society

BULLETIN

POST OFFICE BOX 190 SEPTEMBER 1978 MARTINEZ, CALIFORNIA 94553

CARPENTIER'S CAREER IN CONTRA COSTA TO BE SUBJECT OF NEXT DINNER MEETING

Horce W. Carpentier
Courtesy Moraga Historical Society

Horace Walpole Carpentier may well be one of the most controversial characters in Contra Costa history. Generally portrayed as a "slick operator" who used every maneuver in the book — legal and otherwise — to acquire vast chunks of land from trusting Mexican rancheros, Carpentier was a powerful force in shaping the post Gold Rush history of the central county.

Much has been written about him and many have speculated on his true nature, but few have examined Carpentier's actual record more closely or with more scholarship than Mrs. Dorothy G. Mutnick.

Her talk, "Horace W. Carpentier: A Man of His Times," will highlight our next dinner meeting, which is slated for Wednesday, October 18, 7:30 p.m. at the Concord Elks Club, 3994 Willow Pass Road, Concord. No-host cocktails will precede the dinner at 7 p.m.

Mrs. Mutnick, noted Lafayette historian, will trace Carpentier's 35 years of local land grabbing operations that stripped rancheros of their grants and earned Carpentier both a fortune and an infamous place in history.

"For years our city has been groaning under a monopoly concocted by fraud and consumated by swindling."
—Oakland Mayor Williams, 1857

MRS. DOROTHY G. MUTNICK

(The following interview, concerning our speaker, is reprinted from the Alameda County Historical Society Quarterly for May, 1977.)

While delving into Spanish and Mexican archives and U.S. District Court land cases over a period of years, Mrs. Mutnick crossed paths with Carpentier many times.

"Fortunately," she says, "my husband is an attorney. He led me through some of the stickier wickets in those cases. But taking on microfilm copy of Mission birth records, marriages and burials required that I learn Spanish and pick up the calligraphy and usage of the 18th century."

From those studies she compiled an extensive genealogical record of Californians during the Spanish-Mexican period.

Her interest in history began when she was but a girl. Her father was Prof. Roy Gittinger, an early authority on Oklahoma history and later dean of administration at the University of Oklahoma. His early doctoral theses were published by the University of California Press. Prof. Herbert Eugene Bolton and Herbert Ingram Priestly were his life long friends.

As a girl, Mrs. Mutnick sat quielty listening to their discussions.

"I grew up knee deep in history," she acknowledges.

It isn't surprising to find history her major in college where she received a Phi Beta Kappa key, a B.A. and an M.A. Later, in her teaching career she taught both history and Latin.

"After my husband and I moved from Berkeley to Lafayette in 1951 I began to read Bancroft's History of California with an eye toward local history, and I became fascinated with his footnotes," she tells us.

Mrs. Mutnick was Chairman of the Lafayette Library Association at the time Lafayette got its new library building. "I decided to gather local history for its files and discovered a great dearth of source material — so I set about searching for it."

This was her undoing. She became immersed in its pursuit.

There were National and State archives to explore. Also the California and United States censuses, 40 years of the Contra Costa Gazette and other 19th century newspapers plus State and County statistics, court proceedings, wills, deeds, etc. . . .

In spite of this busy program in research she has had time to serve as president of the Walnut Creek Branch of the American Association of University Women and the Lafayette Women's Club, Consumer Concerns Chairman for the Mt. Diablo District of the California Federation of Women's Clubs and has served on the Board of the Lafayette Senior Housing Association and is a trustee of the Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District.

STEIN COLLECTION FEATURED IN OAKLAND MUSEUM EVENT

Photos, artifacts, maps, old bills and letters from the collection of our First Vice President, Louis L. Stein, Jr. are featured in the current "Welsh Miners and Black Diamonds" display at the Breuner Gallery, Cowell Hall of California History, the Oakland Museum.

The exhibit, sub-titled "The Ghostly Coal Mines of Mt. Diablo", will be shown through December 10. Be sure to see this unusual presentation which covers an important part of Contra Costa history.

HIGHLIGHTS OF CARPENTIER'S CAREER

Attorney, land speculator
Co-founder of Town of Contra Costa (later Oakland)
First Mayor of Oakland
Member the California State Assembly
Owner 13,000 acres of Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados (the Moraga-Bernal grant)
Owner large part of the Rancho San Ramon and the Castro Brothers' El Sobrante
Founder the Viticulture Society in Sonoma
Railroad Developer
President two telegraph companies (sent first telegram from California to President Lincoln)
Columbia University Trustee
Barnard College and Columbia University benefactor

Carpentier built this lovely home in 1865 in what is now Burton Valley. It was both home and headquarters for John B. Watson and then Arthur J. Burton, managers of Carpentier's Moraga lands.

Courtesy Lafayette Historical Society

SANTA CRUZ PATH OF HISTORY TOUR

Last minute reservations for the October 7 Path of History bus tour to Santa Cruz may still be available. For information, call Carole Leland at 254-4149. The tour will leave Concord Park 'n Shop at 8 a.m. and Long's Drugs in Walnut Creek at 8:15 a.m. The excursion will include visits to the old Branciforte mission site, the U.S. Santa Cruz campus and historic Cowell buildings, the boardwalk, a stop at Antonelli's Begonia gardens and the Santa Cruz County museum. The outing is $15 per person. Members and guests should bring their own lunch. Wine and soft drinks will be provided by the Society.

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MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Dinner and Program

Speaker: Dorothy G. Mutnick

Date: October 18, 1978

Place: Concord Elks Club
3994 Willow Pass Road
Concord

Time: 7:00 pm-No-Host Cocktails
7:30 pm-dinner, $5.95

Reservations: J.B. Jory, Secretary
P.O. Box 190
Martinez, CA 94553
Phone: 228-4534

COME ONE! COME ALL!